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HMEC 2011 – Hindu Mandir and Deity Worship – The Manifestation of Divinity

Religion is the manifestation of divinity in the human race. *Bhakti yoga*, the devotional aspect of Yoga, creates a feeling of devotion and closeness to the Supreme Being. In this devout sense, deity worship is an integral aspect of the enlightening experience of the connection to the cosmos. According to many verses in the *Puranas*, and particularly, the *Brahma-samhita*, the Supreme Being does have many intricately described forms in accordance to His pastimes. Such it is possible to know and understand the exact form of the different incarnations of God. This knowledge makes it possible to worship deities. In fact, it is crucial to do so in order to make a spiritual connection with the Supreme Being, and the physical sense of this connection is crucial for one's spiritual development.

In the Hindu Mandir, deity worship is a critical part of one's experience there. When entering a mandir, one is entering the home of the Gods and Goddesses, in order to pray in Their divine glory. The deity is a simple way of expressing one's love and faith for the Supreme Being, in a more physical sense. A devout Hindu will be content to know, that the deity, although mute, has heard his prayers. This simple act, of simply bowing to the deity, is an act of monumental impact.

By worshipping deities, we are accepting that it is indeed a manifestation of divinity. This manifestation is crucial to one's spiritual quest. It is important for one to be able to physically see the deity of our Gods. For example, by concentrating on the deity of Lord Krishna, one is able to create a bond between the Lord Krishna's consciousness and oneself. In this bond, one pays their respects to the venerable God of love.

While deity worship is not to be confused with idol worship, for in experiencing the manifestation of divinity, it is important to foster a personal relationship with the God. The purpose of deity worship is to develop love and devotion for God, rather than the man-made obsession that is associated with idol worship. In the divine sense of God, deity worship is a way to acknowledge His omnipotence and omnipresence. When doing *darshan* and seeing the deity, devotees can become absorbed in serving, remembering, and meditating on Him.

The ultimate reality of Hinduism is the Brahman, characterized by truth, consciousness and bliss. To guide our spiritual development, we pray to the deities. But where does the deity achieve its power? The Hindu mandir is a representation of the invisible divine in the physical form. The statue symbolically stands as a motif for the process of creation. By pouring his devotion and faith into the statue, the devotee is able to bring the deity to life in his mind.

These deities provide a personal view of God. These deities are not the product of someone's imagination; in fact, they are thoroughly described in Vedic literature as *sat-chit-ananda vigraha*, or the form of complete spiritual essence. All the components that make the deity, whether it be the marble, stone, metal, wood that creates the structure, the paint that gives it color, or the clothes that make it beautiful, are all invoked in the material sense. However, with the manifestation of His divine glory, this material energy can be and is transformed into spiritual energy, and vice versa. Through this material view, we can further gaze into the spiritual abyss of divinity. Thus, in the Hindu mandir, the manifestation of divinity is implemented through deity worship.

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